

Benzodiazepines *(say: ben-zo-dye-ay-ze-peens)*

What are benzodiazepines?

These medicines are a type of sedative. They are most often used to relieve anxiety or treat problems sleeping. They can also be used to help manage the effects of alcohol withdrawal.

You are taking:

- ☐ Alprazolam *(say al-pra-zuh-lam)*
- ☐ Diazepam *(say die-a-zuh-pam)*
- ☐ Lorazepam *(say lor-a-zuh-pam)*
- ☐ Oxazepam *(say ox-a-zuh-pam)*
- ☐ Temazepam *(say tuh-ma-zuh-pam)*
- ☐ Clonazepam *(say klo-nay-zuh-pam)*
- ☐ Other: _____

You are taking this medicine for:

- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Sleep difficulties
- ☐ Other: _____

How do benzodiazepines work?

Anxiety can happen when chemicals in your brain are out of balance.

Signs and symptoms of anxiety can include:

- uncontrollable worry or distress, racing thoughts
- irritability
- restlessness, muscle tension
- chest pain or discomfort, shortness of breath, fast heartbeat
- trouble falling or staying asleep

Benzodiazepines work by restoring the balance of chemicals in your brain, which can help manage the symptoms of anxiety. They can also help improve sleep problems for a short time. This includes trouble with falling asleep, staying asleep, and waking up too early.

How quickly will it start working?

- You might start to feel the effects of benzodiazepines within 15 to 60 minutes of taking the medicine.

How do I take my benzodiazepine?

- Benzodiazepines are used temporarily, usually over a few days or weeks to relieve the anxiety or sleep problems.

Note: This medicine **does not replace other anti-anxiety treatments**. If you are regularly taking other medicines to treat anxiety or other mental health conditions, continue to do so as directed by your prescriber.

- You can take it with or without food, unless you are using a sublingual (SL) tablet.
If using a sublingual tablet, allow the tablet to dissolve under your tongue. Do not swallow, eat, or drink for at least 2 minutes after taking the tablet.
- It is best not to drink alcohol while taking this medicine. This medicine can increase the effects of alcohol and make you feel very drowsy, dizzy, and light-headed.
- If you are taking this medicine for sleep, you can take it every night about 30 to 60 minutes before your bedtime, or as needed when having trouble sleeping.

Why is it important to keep taking it?

- Always take this medicine as prescribed.
- Always talk to your prescriber before changing how much or how often you take it.
- After taking benzodiazepines for several weeks, your body might get used to the medicine. If you suddenly stop taking it, you might experience unwanted side effects or withdrawal. These can include any of the following: tremors, rapid heartbeat, fever, sweating, anxiety, irritability, agitation, change in mood and sleep, nausea, diarrhea.

What should I look out for?

Here are some possible side effects and what to do if you notice them.

Common Side Effects



Drowsiness

This medicine can make you feel sleepy and/or sluggish. This can last a few hours after taking your medicine.

Caution: It is dangerous to drive or operate machinery when drowsy.



Dizziness

Take your time getting up from a sitting or lying position. Don't stand up too quickly.

If you feel dizzy or light-headed, try sitting or lying down.



Confusion

Your mind might feel mixed up or you might have trouble remembering things.

Talk to your prescriber if this continues to bother you.



Upset stomach (nausea)

Eat small meals more often during the day.

Take your medicine with food. Drink water.



Feeling uncoordinated

You might feel off balance or unsteady on your feet.

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If you use this medicine for a long time (months to years), you could have other unwanted effects, such as dependence, daytime tiredness, or memory problems.

When should I get help?

See your prescriber as soon as possible if you notice any of these:

- You have thoughts of harming yourself and/or others.
- Your symptoms of anxiety are getting worse.
- You are feeling hopeless, or you feel that there is no way to solve the problem or end the pain.
- You are having any side effects that you think might be caused by this medicine.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away or call 9-1-1 if any of these happen:

- You feel like acting on thoughts of harming yourself and/or others.
- You or another person might have taken too much of this medicine (overdose).
Signs of an overdose can include: slurred speech, severe dizziness, feeling sick, throwing up, weakness.

What else should I know?

- Talk to your prescriber before you use a benzodiazepine with opioid medicine. Taking this medicine with an opioid can increase the chances of an opioid overdose.
- Always check with your prescriber or pharmacist before taking **any of these** because they can change how this medicine works or cause unwanted side effects:
 - new prescription medicines
 - medicines you get without a prescription
 - supplements
 - herbal medicines
 - natural health products
- Before taking this medicine, tell your prescriber if you are pregnant or breastfeeding / chestfeeding.
- Keep your medicine in a clean, dry area at room temperature, away from direct light.
- Keep all medicines out of reach of children.

It's good to ask questions

Anytime you have any questions or concerns about taking this medicine, talk with one of your healthcare team.

Call 8-1-1 (HealthLinkBC) after hours and for any other health advice.

HealthLinkBC is open 24 hours a day and available in 130 languages. For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.